Trump feels 'badly' for royal family over Andrew-Epstein saga

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE: US President Donald Trump said Sunday he felt "badly" for the UK royal family after King Charles III revoked his brother Andrew's title of prince over his scandalous ties to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

"I feel very badly. I mean, it's a terrible thing that's happened to the family," Trump said when asked by a reporter aboard Air Force One about the recent saga.

"That's been a tragic situation, and it's too bad. I mean, I feel badly for the family." Trump, 79, has faced his own political woes in recent months over his own alleged relationship with Epstein, the New York financier who died in prison in 2019.

Trump's comments came as the British government said it would move to strip the former prince, now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, of his honorary title of vice-admiral, his last remaining military rank.

The US president has frequently expressed admiration for Britain's royal family, most recently when Charles hosted him for a lavish state visit in September.

Trump received a full state dinner at Windsor Castle, military parades, and a flyover during the visit.

But the so-called Epstein files have been the focal point of a controversy engulfing the second presidency of Trump, who was a longtime friend of Epstein.

In July, the Trump administration announced that it had discovered no new evidence justifying the release of additional documents or the opening of a new investigation into the matter.

Epstein died while awaiting trial for alleged sex trafficking of underage girls recruited to provide him with sexual massages.

Conspiracy theories

Authorities ruled his death a suicide, but it has fueled countless conspiracy theories among Trump's voter base that he was murdered to prevent him from implicating high-profile figures.

Republican Trump has repeatedly denied any involvement with the Epstein affair, dismissing it as a "hoax" by rival Democrats.—AFP

Train derailment leaves four injured in UK

SHAP: A train derailed on Monday morning after a reported landslide in the remote hills of northwest England, leaving four people with minor injuries, emergency and rail services said.

Dozens of passengers were led off the 4:28 am (0428 GMT) Avanti West Coast service train from Glasgow in Scotland to London Euston station after it derailed at Shap, Cumbria, a gateway to the more mountainous Lake District.

"The incident followed a suspected landslip in the area, which has been experiencing significant adverse weather conditions, and extremely heavy rainfall continues to compound the issue," Network Rail said in a statement. "The front carriage came off the tracks but remained upright," transport police said, adding that 85 people were escorted off the train.—AFP

SAN JULIAN: Coast guard personnel assist in evacuating residents along coastal areas of central Philippines. Thousands of people were evacuated in the country ahead of a typhoon due to make landfall in the region on Tuesday.—AFP

Disagreements stall democratic reform plan in Bangladesh

• Khaleda Zia to contest elections • Music teacher plan scrapped after Jamaat anger

DHAKA: Disagreements between Bangladeshi politicians have stalled a key democratic reform plan, the interim government said on Monday, giving parties a week to reach consensus or face unilateral action.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, who leads the government as "chief adviser", said he had inherited a "completely broken down" political system after taking over following an uprising last year. Yunus has argued that the reform charter, which he has championed as the cornerstone of his legacy, is vital to prevent a return to authoritarian rule.

Key parties signed the document at a ceremony in October, but some said it must be ratified by a referendum. Asif Nazrul, who holds the law portfolio in the interim government, told reporters that "despite holding discussions for a long time, political parties still have unresolved issues of disagreement." He cited disagreements on "the timetable of the referendum and the topics to be included".

The "July Charter", named after the revolt, has become a flashpoint between parties vying for power ahead of national elections expected in February 2026. Yunus, who has pledged to step down after elections, says the reform plan will strengthen checks and balances between the executive, judicial and legislative branches. It proposes a two-term limit for prime ministers and expanded presidential powers.

"We urge the political parties to come up with a united position on the referendum at the earliest — preferably within a week," Nazrul said.

"Otherwise, the government will act independently." Salahuddin Ahmed, a senior leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), suggested the decision was not up to the interim government. "I have never seen a referee try to score a goal", he said.

Leaders of the BNP — seen as among the election front-runners — as well as Jamaat-e-Islami signed the charter.

Khaleda to contest elections

Former Bangladeshi prime minister Khaleda Zia will contest elections expected in February, her influential political party said on Monday. The 80-year-old has been a dominant figure for decades in the country's turbulent power struggles.

Her participation was announced by Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, a senior BNP leader, who said she will contest in three constituencies. The uncompromising leader has been in poor health following years of imprisonment under her arch-enemy Sheikh Hasina, who was overthrown in a mass uprising in August 2024.

Her son, Tarique Rahman, 59, who has been in Britain since 2008, will also run, Alamgir told reporters.

Rahman, known in Bangladesh as Tarique Zia, has lived in London since 2008, saying he fled politically-motivated persecution. He is yet to return to Bangladesh.

Music teacher plan

Bangladesh has cancelled plans to hire music teachers for primary schools, a government official said on Monday. In August, the ministry overseeing primary education issued a circular announcing the recruitment of music teachers — a decision that the interim government has now reversed.

"The government has scrapped the decision and issued an order", a senior ministry official said. "Both the music and physical education posts have now been dropped," said the official.

The reversal follows strong protests from Bangladesh's largest religious political party, Jamaat-i-Islami, and other organisations that oppose the inclusion of music in school curricula.—AFP

Thailand, Cambodia withdraw heavy weapons from border

BANGKOK: Thailand and Cambodia have begun withdrawing heavy weapons and conducting de-mining operations along their contested border as part of steps to de-escalate tensions following last week's signing of an extended truce, Thai officials said on Monday.

The leaders of Thailand and Cambodia signed an enhanced ceasefire deal last week in Kuala Lumpur in the presence of US President Donald Trump, three months after border tensions between the two countries exploded into a deadly five-day conflict.

Government spokesman Siripong Angkasakulkiat said Thailand would not release 18 Cambodian soldiers it has held since the conflict or re-open border checkpoints until it assessed Cambodia was adhering to the agreement.

Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri, a Thai defence ministry spokesman, told a press conference that de-mining operations along the border have started, with Thailand proposing the removal of land mines in 13 areas and Cambodia in one.

On Friday, the two countries said in a joint statement that they had agreed to withdraw heavy weapons from the border in three phases, starting with rocket systems, followed by artillery and then tanks and other armoured vehicles.

On Saturday, the Cambodian defence ministry said the first phase of the withdrawal was scheduled to take three weeks from Nov 1. "We expect the withdrawal of heavy weapons to be concluded by the end of the year," Surasant said.

The two countries have also stepped up joint efforts to combat transnational cybercrime and were working on an urgent joint demarcation effort at disputed border areas, he said.—Reuters

Urgent action needed to tackle health financing emergency, WHO says

New UN report tackles 'inequality-pandemic cycle'

GENEVA/JOHANNESBURG: Urgent action is required to address a growing global crisis in financing vital health systems, as countries grapple with towering debt and plummeting aid, the World Health Organisation said on Monday.

The UN agency launched guidance for countries on how to counter the immediate and long-term effects of the sudden and severe cuts to external funding, which have dramatically disrupted essential health services in many places.

"The world is now facing a global health financing emergency that demands urgent, coordinated action," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a meeting of African Union member states in Geneva.

Under President Donald Trump, the United States — traditionally the world's top donor — has heavily slashed foreign aid, causing havoc across the globe, while other major international aid donors have been tightening their belts.

This has taken a dire toll in poorer countries in Africa and beyond, which have relied heavily on foreign assistance to cover basic healthcare needs. The WHO said that in 2025, external health aid was projected to be down by more than 30 per cent compared to 2023. Data from March showed immediate disruptions in health services in around 70pc of low- and middle-income countries.

'Critical shortage'

"These sudden cuts are already causing widespread disruption to health systems and services. One third of countries now report critical shortages of essential medicines and health programmes," Tedros said.

He stressed, though, that even before the sudden cuts, "health financing was off track", with debt soaring during the Covid-19 pandemic, worsening longstanding public underfunding of the sector.

The current crisis, he said, thereby presents "an opportunity to leave behind the era of aid dependency and embrace a new era of sovereignty, self-reliance and solidarity".

Peter Sands, head of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, agreed and said it was now "all the more important that African states accelerate their progress towards self-reliance".

High inequality

"High levels of inequality, within and between countries, are making the world more vulnerable to pandemics, making pandemics more economically disruptive and deadly, and making them last longer," a report by the UNAIDS-convened Global Council on Inequality, AIDS and Pandemics and published ahead of meetings of G20 leaders in South Africa this month said.

"Pandemics in turn increase inequality, driving the cyclical, self-reinforcing relationship," it said.

The council that produced the report was led by experts, including Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz, former Namibia First Lady Monica Geingos, and renowned epidemiologist Sir Michael Marmot.

"Failure to tackle key inequalities and social determinants since Covid-19 has left the world extremely vulnerable to, and unprepared for, the next pandemic," it said.

The Covid-19 pandemic "pushed 165 million people into poverty while the world's richest people increased their wealth by more than a quarter", they said.

Breaking the cycle

Inequality "is a political choice, and a dangerous one that threatens everyone's health", Geingos said in a press release. The report called on world leaders to increase pandemic preparedness by investing in "social protection mechanisms" within their countries while also tackling global inequality, including through debt restructuring for developing countries.

"Pandemics are not only health crises; they are economic crises that can deepen inequality if leaders make the wrong policy choices," Stiglitz said.

"When efforts to stabilise pandemic-hit economies are paid for through high-interest on debts and through austerity measures, they starve health, education and social protection systems," he said.

This made societies less resilient and more vulnerable to disease outbreaks.

"Breaking this cycle requires enabling all countries to have the fiscal space to invest in health security," Stiglitz said.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

TOKYO: Visitors walk during a wedding ceremony at Meiji shrine, coinciding with an autumn festival and a Culture Day public holiday.—AFP

DUST rises after a part of the medaieval tower collapsed.—AFP

GAZA CITY: Palestinian children take part in recreational activities organised by the Red Crescent Society.—Reuters

MEXICO CITY: A man in costume poses for a picture with Xoloitzcuintle dogs to mark the 'day of the dead'. The breed is native to Mexico and believed in Aztec mythology to be guide dogs to the afterlife, .—AFP

Mediaeval tower partially collapses in Rome, trapping worker

ROME: A medieval tower in central Rome that was under renovation partially collapsed on Monday, with one worker believed to be trapped alive under rubble, authorities said.

Part of the Torre dei Conti collapsed just after 11:30 am (1030 GMT), sending rubble into the street and a thick white cloud of dust into the air.

"It's a very complex situation for the firefighters because there is a person trapped inside," Rome Prefect Lamberto Giannini said.

"There are signs — we don't know the condition — but there are signs that he is still alive," he said.

The tower is situated in a bustling area, just off the Imperial Forum and near the Colosseum, Italy's most popular tourist attraction.

Three workers inside the tower were evacuated, with one taken to the hospital in critical condition, a firefighter spokesman said.

Rome Mayor Roberto Gualtieri and Italian Culture Minister Alessandro Giuli were present as firefighters cordoned off the street and moved back crowds.

A second partial collapse of the tower about one and a half hours later sent up further billowing clouds of dust.

After the first collapse, firefighters managed to "put up some protection" around the trapped man, so when the second collapse occurred, "they obviously shielded him", Giannini said.

With dust still in the air, firefighters used cranes to reach tower windows, while a drone entered through another window for an inspection.

One worker inside at the time of the first collapse said he escaped from a balcony.

"It was not safe. I want to go home," said the man, white dust covering his uniform, who gave his name as Ottaviano and his age as 67.—AFP

KHARTOUM: Schoolgirls hold signs during a protest against human rights violations allegedly committed by Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in El Fasher.—AFP